

Marina's Story

**MOVIE ABOUT
OSWALD'S WIDOW
REVEALS A
CLUELESS WIFE
AND COURAGEOUS
MOTHER**

BY JOE LEYDON
FROM DALLAS

Lee Harvey Oswald is furious. Barely able to contain his rage, he bobs and weaves like an anxious dragonfly around his very pregnant wife, Marina, as she struggles to hang laundry on a sagging clothesline.

He wants to know—no, he demands to know—why she spoke with a federal agent who mysteriously appeared at their front door.

"Maybe I should have closed the door in his face," Marina snaps in her Russian-accented English, "and told him to go straight to hell!"

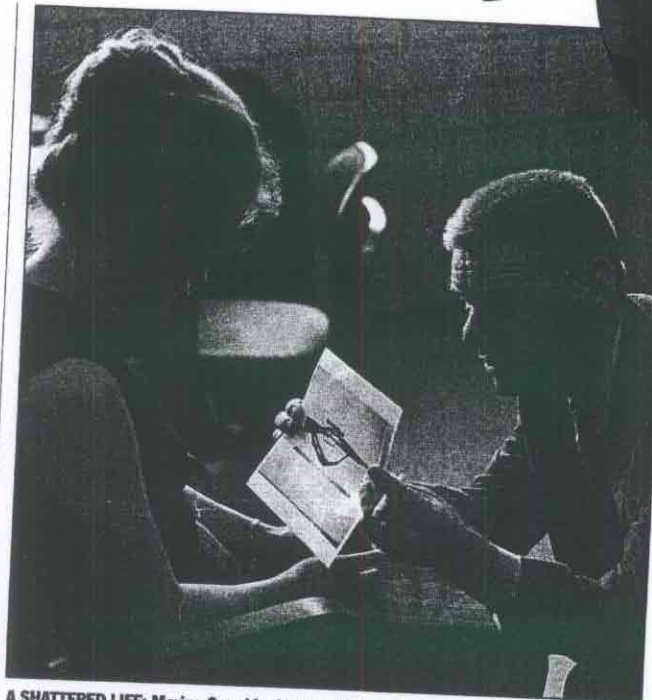
"That's right!" Oswald hisses, as though mindful of possible eavesdroppers in adjoining back yards. "That's exactly what you should have done!"

And then, realizing that sarcasm is getting him nowhere, Oswald plays his trump card: "Remember! You're here on a temporary visa! Don't fool with these people!"

Just then an off-camera plane flies too low overhead. The sound man shakes his head in bitter dismay, and director Robert Dornhelm cries: "Cut!"

Too bad: Actor Frank Whaley was working up some perfect-pitch paranoia as Oswald, a man obsessed with maintaining a low profile even in the presence of his wife. And Helena Bonham Carter, usually seen as a cosseted Victorian beauty in the likes of "Howards End" and "Room With a View," was almost heartbreaking in her forlorn dowdiness, and in her triple-exposure eruption of defiance, fear and dark suspicion.

On a quiet street in a residential



A SHATTERED LIFE: Marina Oswald, played by Helena Bonham Carter, faces conspiracy issues and FBI interrogations in the NBC movie "Fatal Deception."

area of Dallas' Oak Cliff neighborhood, Whaley, Bonham Carter and a small army of technicians are working at typical TV-movie warp speed on "Fatal Deception: Mrs. Lee Harvey Oswald," the docudrama being pitched by NBC as the "personal story of Marina Oswald's understanding of the tragic events of November, 1963." The screenplay by Steve Bello ("Howard Beach: Making the Case for Murder") is an ambitious mix of documented facts (including material taken from FBI and KGB files) and informed speculation, with considerable input from Marina Oswald Porter herself.

Bonham Carter explains: "The framework of it is it's 1978, when she becomes more aware after 15 years of having believed what she was browbeaten into saying at the Warren Commission hearings. And she starts to reopen it, and assessing it herself, and becoming more aware of other possibilities. And so, inevitably, it does involve the conspiracy theories. But

not in any great depth. It's more of an emotional viewpoint, looking back."

"Fatal Deception," filmed in Dallas and Moscow, follows the Oswalds in extended flashbacks of their first meeting in Marina's native Russia, their subsequent marriage and voyage to America, and their dysfunctional domestic life in various low-rent apartments. All during their days in Dallas, Marina worries about her abusive husband's wild mood swings and fears the worst as he refuses to inform her of his whereabouts during his frequent absences.

"The thing you have to remember," Bonham Carter says, "is that Marina didn't really understand very much English. She really didn't speak it. So she was in a position to really be as innocent as possible as to what was happening around her."

Then comes Nov. 22, 1963. Oswald is arrested, charged with assassinating President John F. Kennedy and, two days later, gunned down by nightclub owner Jack Ruby. Marina

tries to pull her life together, the mother of two young daughters—only a few weeks old—and the widow of the most despised man in America.

Producer Bernard Sofronski ("Murder in Mississippi") says he was inspired to make "Fatal Deception" five years ago—before Oliver Stone began filming "JFK"—after seeing an image not unlike the scene filmed in the Oak Cliff back yard.

"I was looking at the newspaper," Sofronski says, "and I forget what the story was, but the visual was Marina hanging children's clothes on a hanging clothesline. And that was the beginning of this thing for me, with me saying, 'God, there's no way I can identify, being a parent myself, with what it must have been like, in terms of the aftermath, to be the wife of an accused assassin, to be the daughters of a father who's an accused assassin.'"

Sofronski decided to satisfy his curiosity through research and, eventually, conversations with Marina and her two adult daughters (Rachel and June, "who have not wanted to be active in this project," the producer says).

"So much of this was like being a bear," Sofronski says. "When the pain levels get too great, just like a bear, you go to sleep. And by marrying [Dallas electronics analyst] Kenneth Porter" in 1965, "she could be incognito. That's what saved her and her children for a long period."

"You see, Marina's pain was that she thought she failed. If she had been a better wife and woman, she would have prevented this assassination. That was her crime and punishment, until she was able to move away from that, and say that she did nothing wrong."

"Fatal Deception: Mrs. Lee Harvey Oswald" airs Monday at 9 p.m. on NBC.

Joe Leydon is a free-lance writer based in Dallas.